DC
BATMAN
458
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APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
MEET HAROLD.
HE'S HATED, HUNTED, DESPISED
...AND HE MAY BE BATMAN'S BEST FRIEND.
GRANT
BREYFOGLE
MITCHELL
KEEP OUT
DUE FOR
DEMOLITION
ROUGHER

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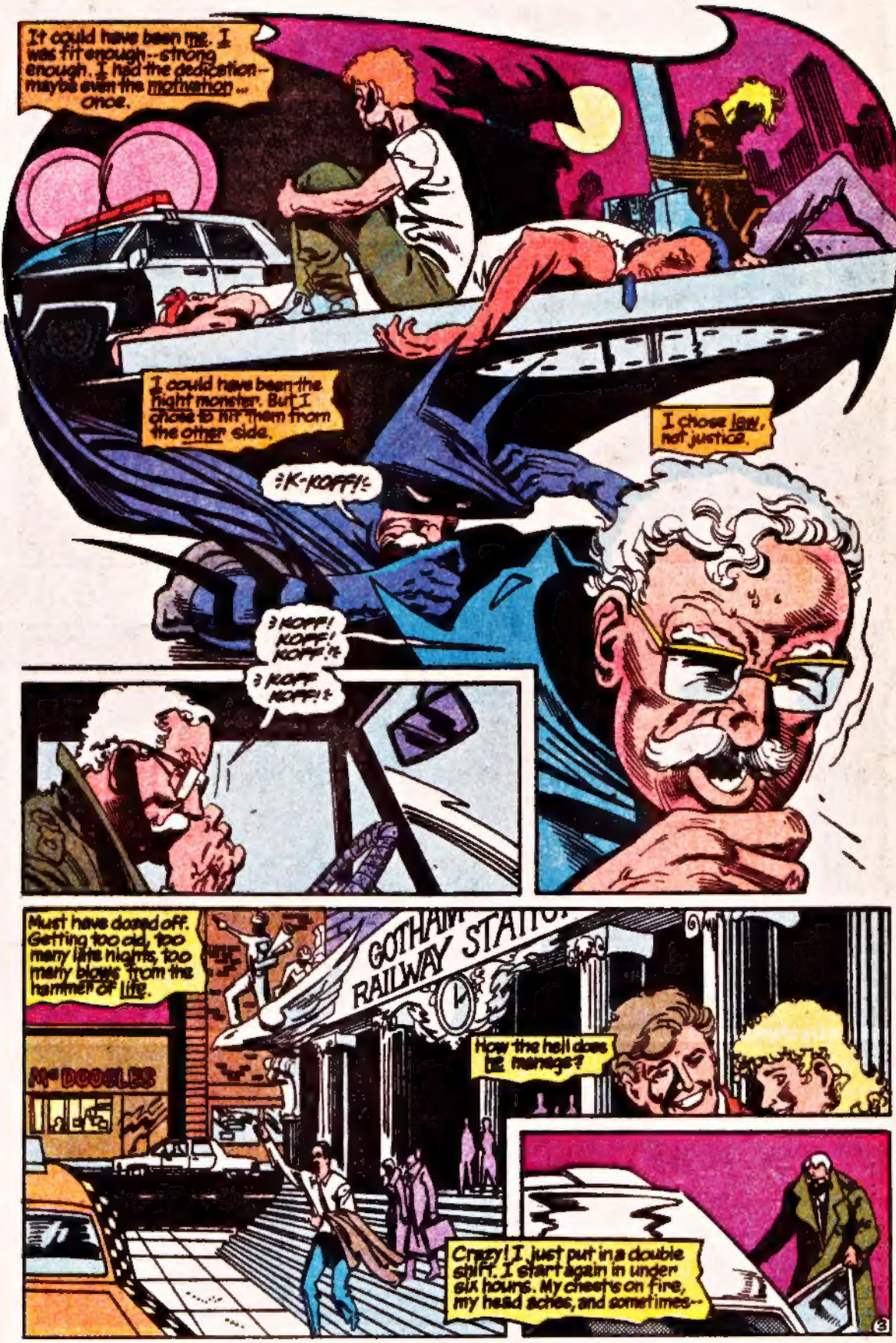
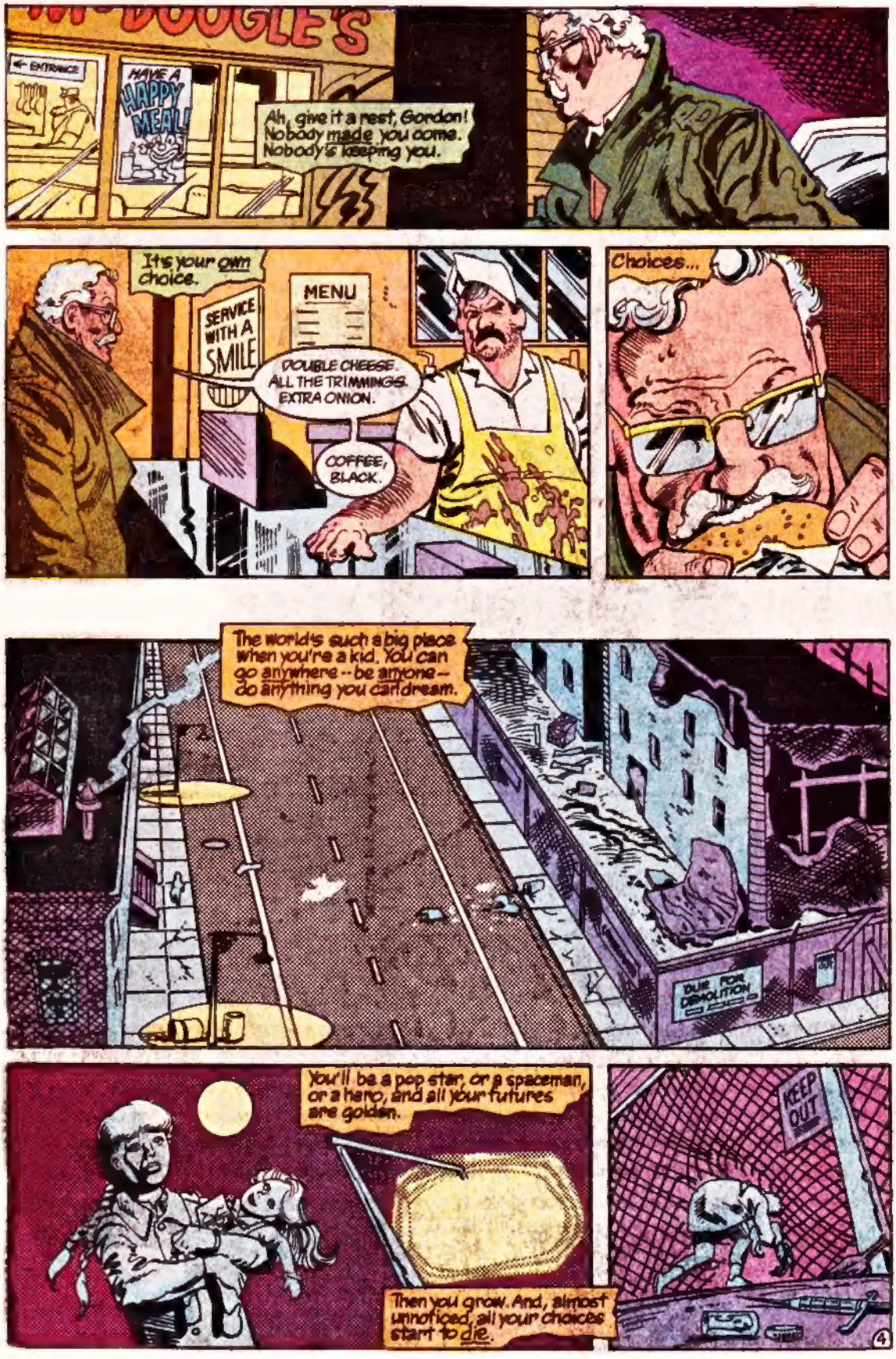
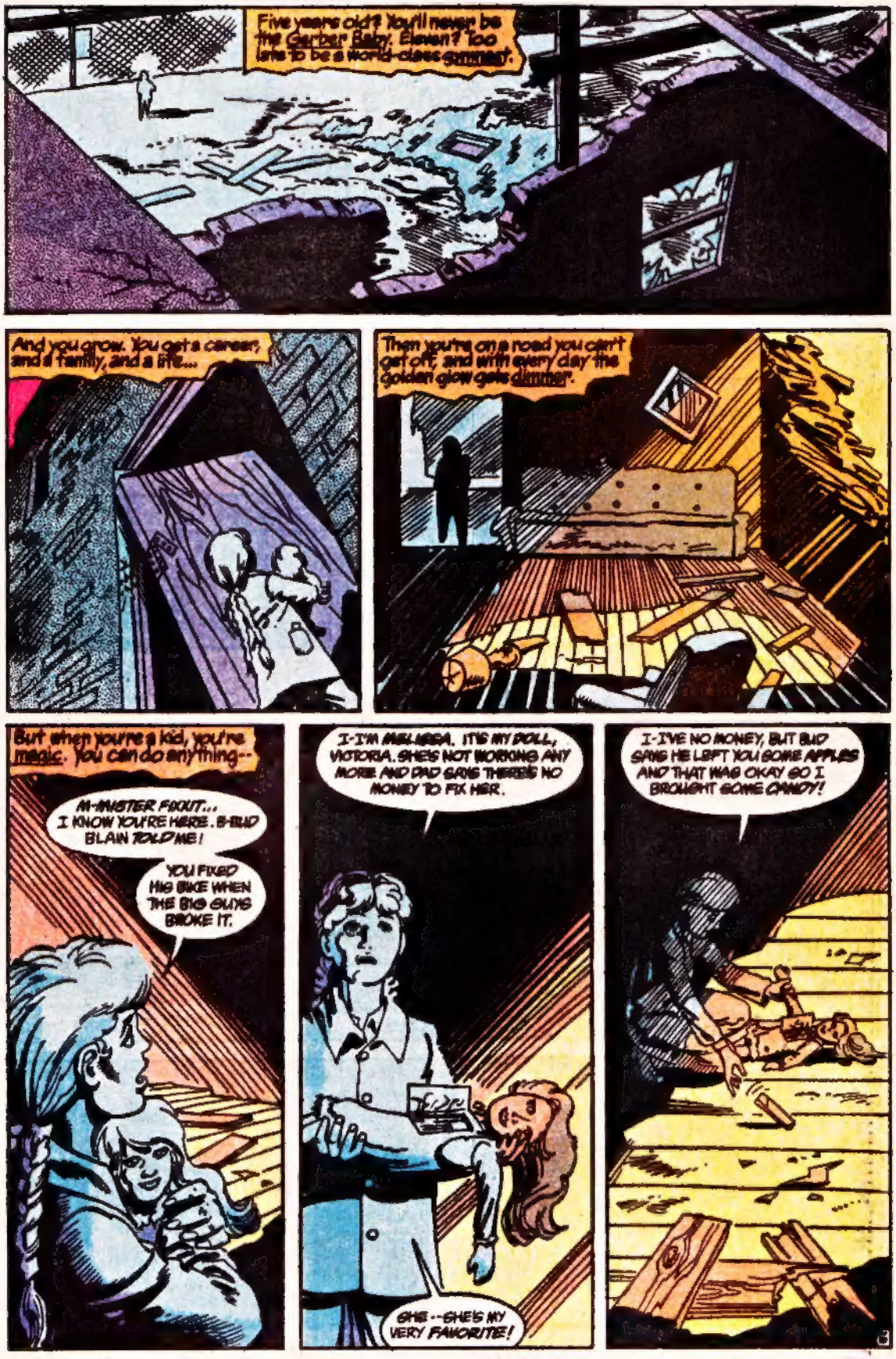
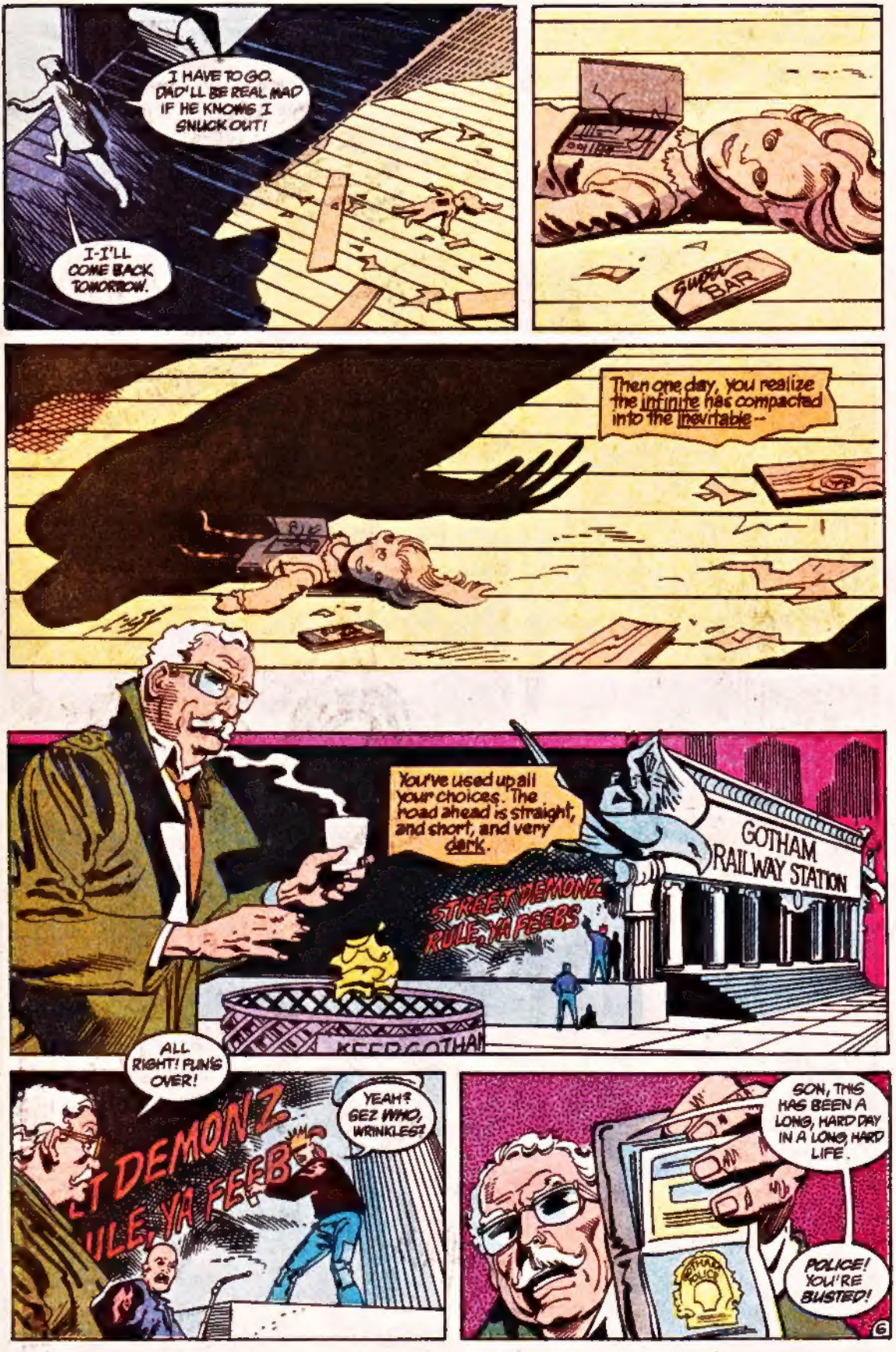
Swooping from the shadows like Hell's own angel--
FRATCH!
OOF!
Demon of the Darkness, dispensing instant justice--
BLAM! BLAM!
BLAM!
Bloody retribution!
SPOK!
Voice chilled, like frosted razors--
SQUIT
SCUM LIKE YOU NEVER LEARN. THERE'S ONLY ONE THING COMES OUT THE END OF A NEEDLE--
DEATH!
12


It could have been me. I was fit enough--strong enough. I had the dedication--maybe even the motivation... once.
I could have been the night monster. But I chose to hit them from the other side.
I chose law, not justice.
:K-KOFF!:
:KOFF! KOFF! KOFF!:
:KOFF KOFF!:
Must have dozed off. Getting too old, too many late nights, too many blows from the hammer of life.
GOTHAM RAILWAY STATION
Mr DOODLES
How the hell does he manage?
Crazy! I just put in a double shift. I start again in under six hours. My cheek's on fire, my head aches, and sometimes--
3


ENTRANCE
HAVE A HAPPY MEAL!
Ah, give it a rest, Gordon! Nobody made you come. Nobody's keeping you.
It's your own choice.
SERVICE WITH A SMILE
MENU
DOUBLE CHEESE. ALL THE TRIMMINGS. EXTRA ONION.
COFFEE, BLACK.
Choices...
The world's such a big place when you're a kid. You can go anywhere -- be anyone -- do anything you can dream.
DUE FOR DEMOLITION
You'll be a pop star, or a spaceman, or a hero, and all your futures are golden.
Then you grow. And, almost unnoticed, all your choices start to die.
KEEP OUT
4


Five years old? You'll never be the Gerber Baby. Eleven? Too late to be a world-class gymnast.
And you grow. You get a career, and a family, and a life...
Then you're on a road you can't get off, and with every day the golden glow gets dimmer.
But when you're a kid, you're magic. You can do anything--
M-MISTER FIXIT... I KNOW YOU'RE HERE. B-BUD BLAIN TOLD ME!
YOU FIXED HIS BIKE WHEN THE BIG GUYS BROKE IT.
I-I'M MELINDA. IT'S MY DOLL, VICTORIA. SHE'S NOT WORKING ANY MORE AND DAD SAYS THERE'S NO MONEY TO FIX HER.
SHE--SHE'S MY VERY FAVORITE!
I-I'VE NO MONEY, BUT BUD SAYS HE LEFT YOU SOME APPLES AND THAT WAS OKAY SO I BROUGHT SOME CANDY!
3

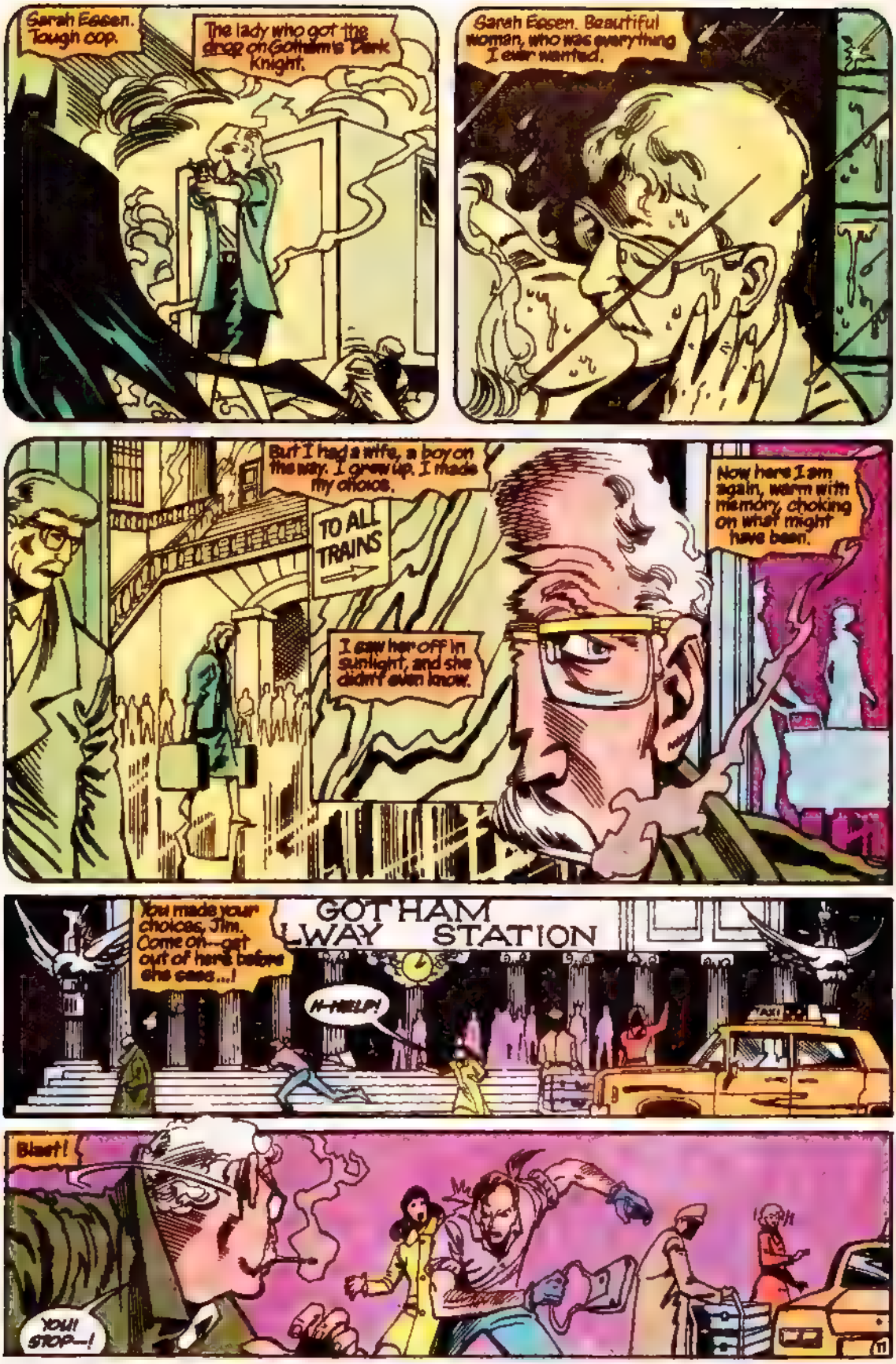

I HAVE TO GO. DAD'LL BE REAL MAD IF HE KNOWS I SNUCK OUT!
I-I'LL COME BACK TOMORROW.
SUPER BAR
Then one day, you realize the infinite has compacted into the inevitable--
You've used up all your choices. The road ahead is straight, and short, and very dark.
GOTHAM RAILWAY STATION
STREET DEMONZ RULE, YA FEEBS
ALL RIGHT! FUN'S OVER!
YEAH? GEZ WHO, WRINKLES?
SON, THIS HAS BEEN A LONG, HARD DAY IN A LONG, HARD LIFE.
POLICE! YOU'RE BUSTED!
6

SO CATCH UP, GRANDDAD!
HEYY--!
:KOFF KOFF!:
HAHA HAHA HAHA!
Don't know why I came. Maybe the late train's an omen.
You made your choices, Jim. The die was cast a long time ago. It's way too late to change.
Yes, I could have been him. Once.
When you get to the what-ifs, you're living on borrowed time!
ZZZZ
SALE
SHSHH
POLICE! YOU'RE BUSTED!
BATMAN IN CAMELOT
H-HUH? WHAT...?
7

H-HI, GUYS. FUNNIN' AROUND, HUH?
I...I'D SHARE MY BOTTLE WITH YA, BUT--
YA DRUNK IT ALL YERSELF! CHEEZ, I DUNNO--DEMONZ LET OLD SOAKS LIKE YOU CRASH ON OUR TURF, YGOTTA EXPECT TA PAY A LITTLE RENT NOW AN' AGAIN!
SWACK!
I AIN'T GOT NO MONEY--!
THAT'S OKAY. WE'LL TAKE PAYMENT IN PUN!
AAAAH!
KRAK!
MY WRIST--!
Y-YOU BROKE MY WRIST!
SNAP

MELISSA...?
MELISSA?
SHE'S NOT THERE, PAUL! HER DOLL'S GONE, TOO!
I KNEW IT! SHE'S BEEN LISTENING TO THOSE OTHER KIDS!
PAUL--BE CAREFUL! YOU CAN'T BE SURE--!
HOW SURE DO I HAVE TO BE? DEAD SURE? 'CUZ THAT'S WHERE IT'S GOING TO END UP!
BAM BAM!
BOB! BOB!
WAKE UP AND GET OUT HERE!
PAUL? WHAT THE HELL'S GOING ON...?
MELISSA'S MISSING, THAT'S WHAT! GET DRESSED AND WAKE SOME OF THE OTHERS!
WE'RE GONNA TAKE CARE OF THIS FIXXIT ONCE AND FOR ALL.

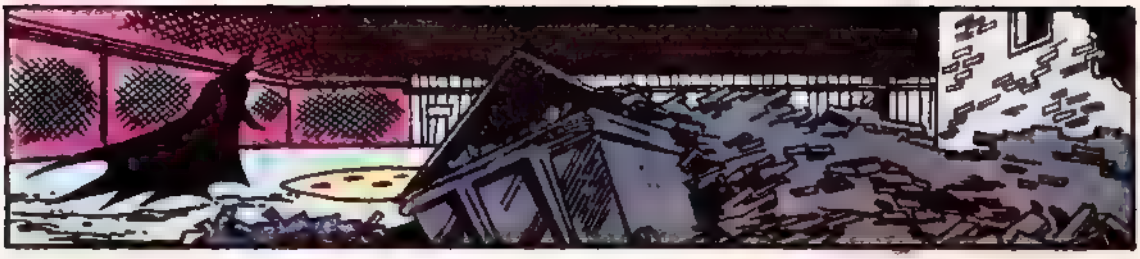
ARRIVALS
CITY GATE
ALBANY 28
NEW YORK 29
BOSTON 30
PHILADELPHIA 31
Time was, I chose to give up nicotine.
GATE 29
Look at me now--stained brown fingers and a wheeze that would awaken the dead.
But it steadies the nerves...
God! I feel like a kid!
Maybe that's why I'm here. To remember the magic.
To torture myself with what-ifs.
Then I see her--
And it's like a bomb goes off in my heart.
Sarah Essen. Clever cop.
My right hand in those early days, when catching the Batman was as important as catching his prey!


Sarah Essen. Tough cop.
The lady who got the drop on Gotham's Dark Knight.
Sarah Essen. Beautiful woman, who was everything I ever wanted.
But I had a wife, a boy on the way. I grew up. I made my choices.
TO ALL TRAINS
I saw her off in sunlight, and she didn't even know.
Now here I am again, warm with memory, choking on what might have been.
You made your choices, Jim. Come on—get out of here before she sees...!
GOTHAM WAY STATION
H-HELP!
Blast!
YOU! STOP—!

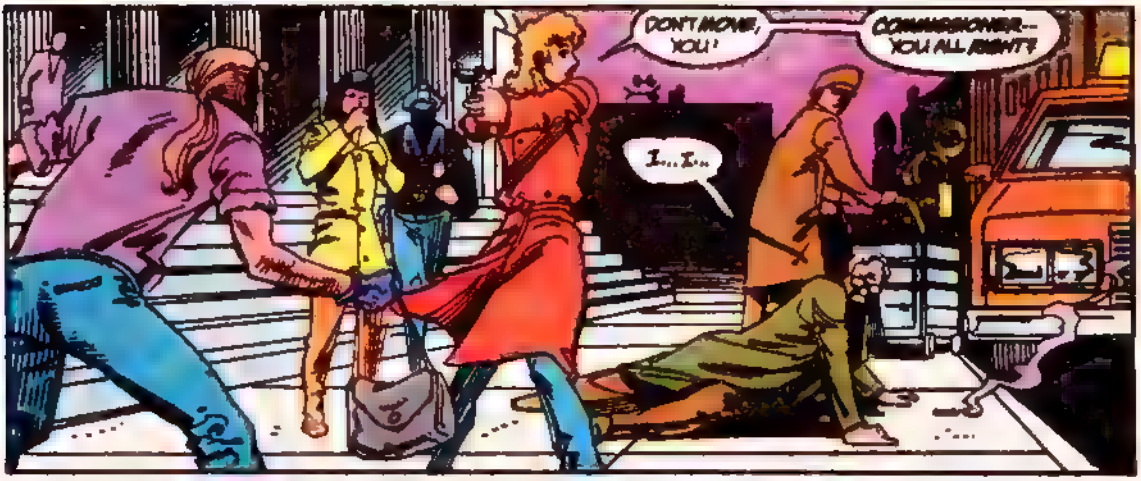
HE HEARS VOICES...
...RAISED IN ANGER.
COUPLE OF BLOCKS AWAY..
PAF
ZWEEEEEEE
MELISSA!
MELISSA! IT'S DADDY!
ARE YOU IN THERE, HONEY?
DON'T WORRY, BABY! WE'RE COMING TO GET YOU!

WE WON'T LET THAT FREAK HURT YOU!
DANGER
OR DEMO
WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?
IT'S MY LITTLE GIRL! SHE'S MISSING!
HAVE YOU TOLD THE POLICE?
I DON'T NEED TO!
WE KNOW WHERE SHE IS!
DANGER
FOR DEMO
THERE'S SOME KINDA FREAK LIVES THERE--A MUTANT, OR SOMETHING! HE'S BEEN ENTICING THE KIDS...!
YOU'RE SURE OF THIS?
SHE TOLD ME ABOUT HIM! I FORBADE HER EVER TO COME HERE!
MY BILLY CLAIMS THE MONSTER FIXED HIS BIKE!
FIXIT--THAT'S WHAT THEY CALL HIM!
13

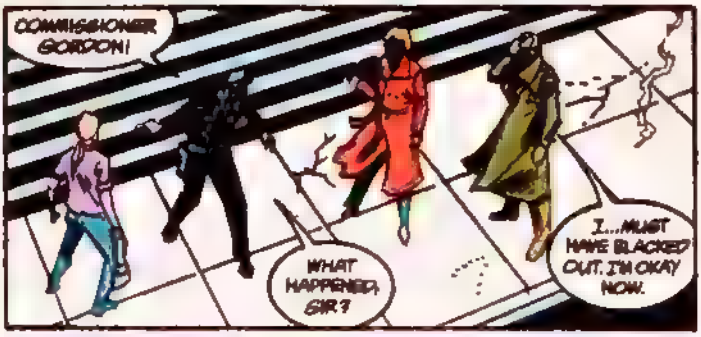
DOESN'T SOUND LIKE A MONSTER TO ME. WAIT HERE-- I'LL GO CHECK--
OH YEAH? AND WHEN DID BOB APPOINT YOU GUARDIAN OF GOTHAM?
SHE'S MY DAUGHTER! I'LL FIND HER--
GET THIS FENCE DOWN!
RENCH!
AND IF SHE'S WITH THAT PERVERT, I SWEAR I'LL KILL HIM!
NO WAY HE CAN STOP THEM, SHORT OF VIOLENCE. THERE ARE NO WORDS TO COPE WITH A PARENT'S FEARS.
IN HERE!
A LITTLE GIRL COULDN'T RIP AWAY THE FENCE LIKE THEY DID. THERE MUST BE--
SHE CAME IN HERE-- AND THE FOOTPRINTS ARE ONE-WAY ONLY!



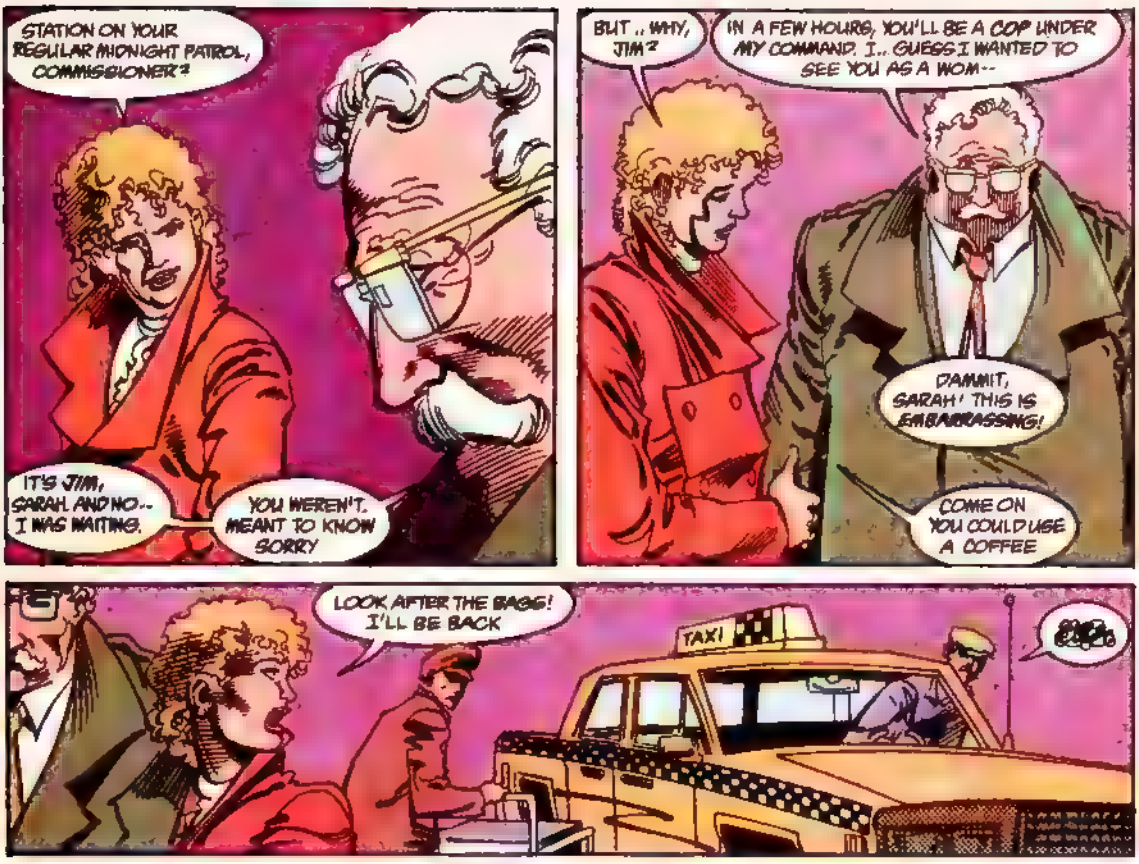
HH-HAVE...?

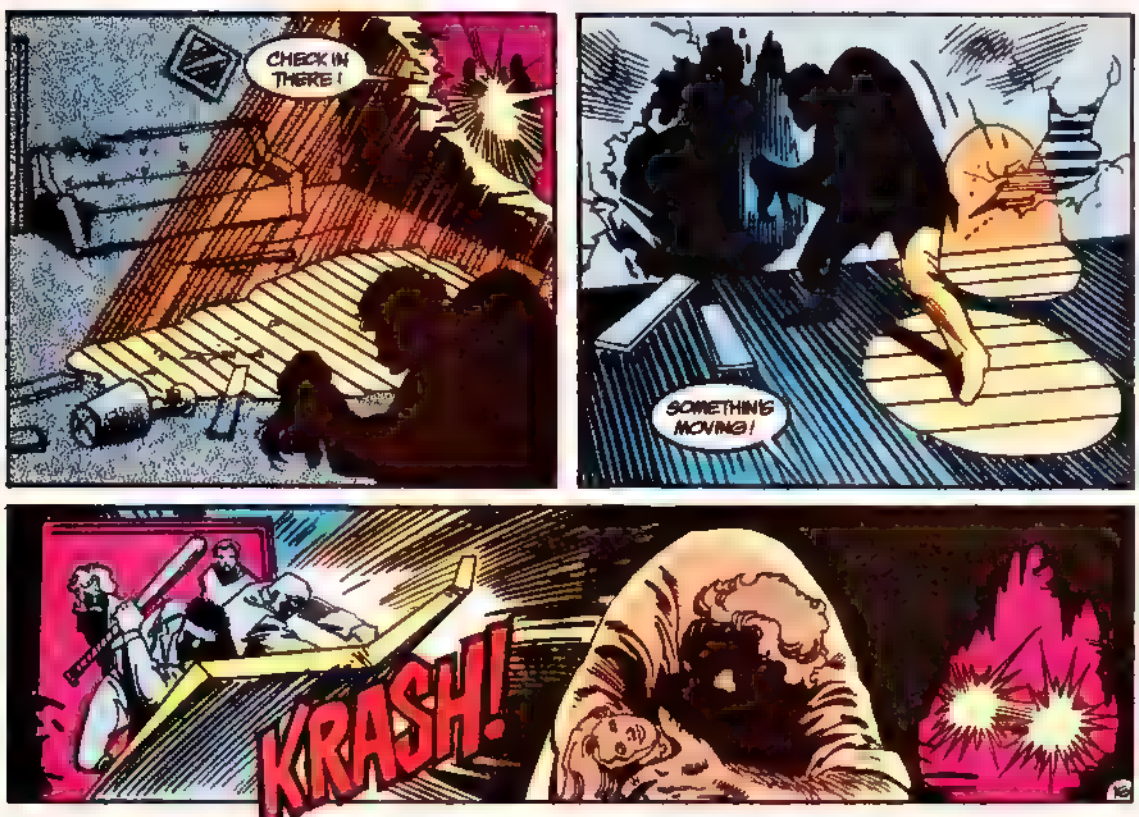

DON'T MOVE, YOU!
COMMISSIONER--YOU ALL RIGHT?
I...I...

I'VE BEEN IN THIS MOVIE BEFORE!


COMMISSIONER GORDON!
WHAT HAPPENED, SIR?
I...MUST HAVE BLACKED OUT. I'M OKAY NOW.

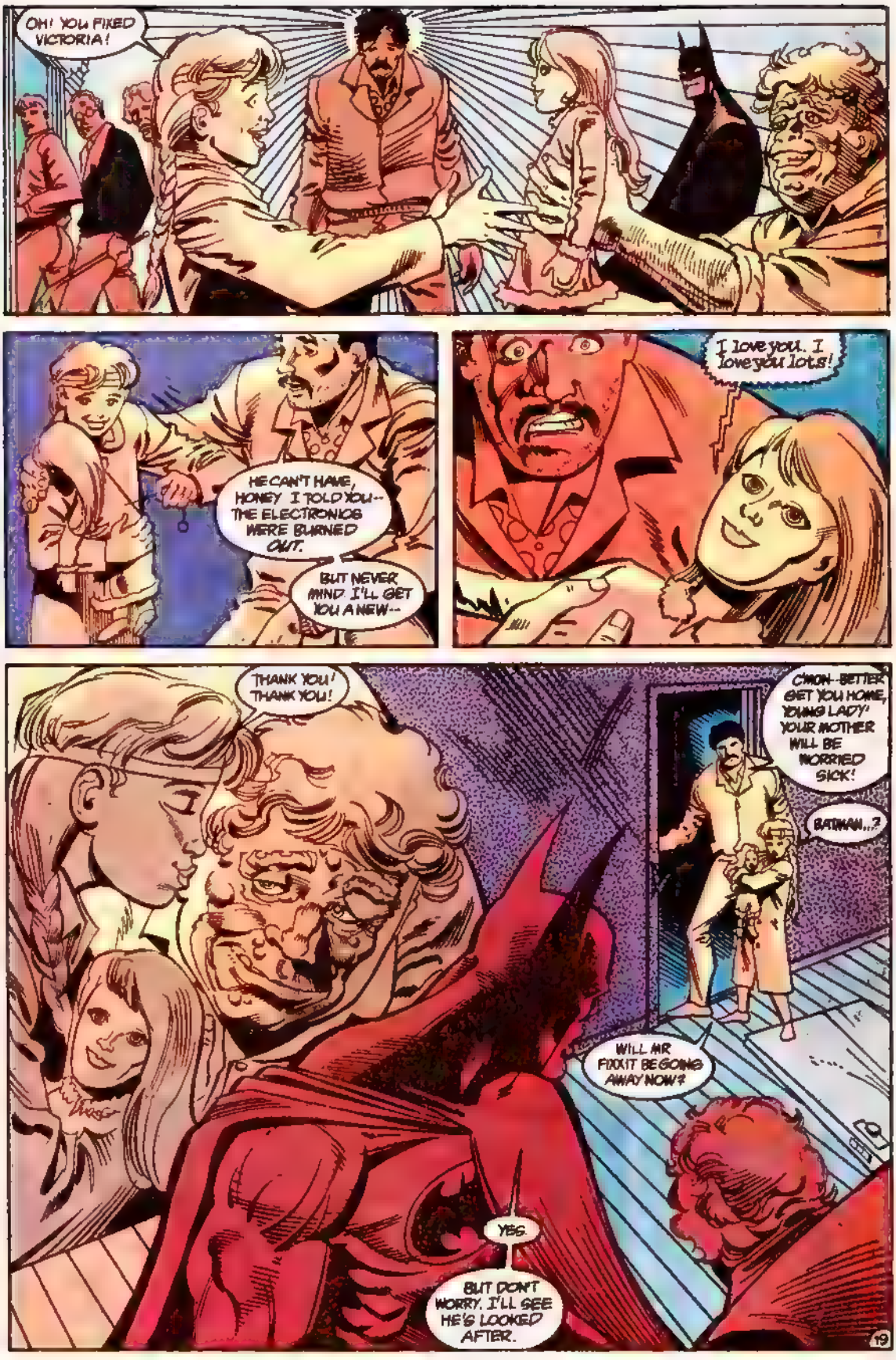
RUN HIM IN, WILL YOU?
AND THE LADY...?
SHE'S ONE OF US. SERGEANT REGAN, LATE OF NEW YORK'S FINEST--STARTS ON GOTHAM'S WORST TOMORROW!

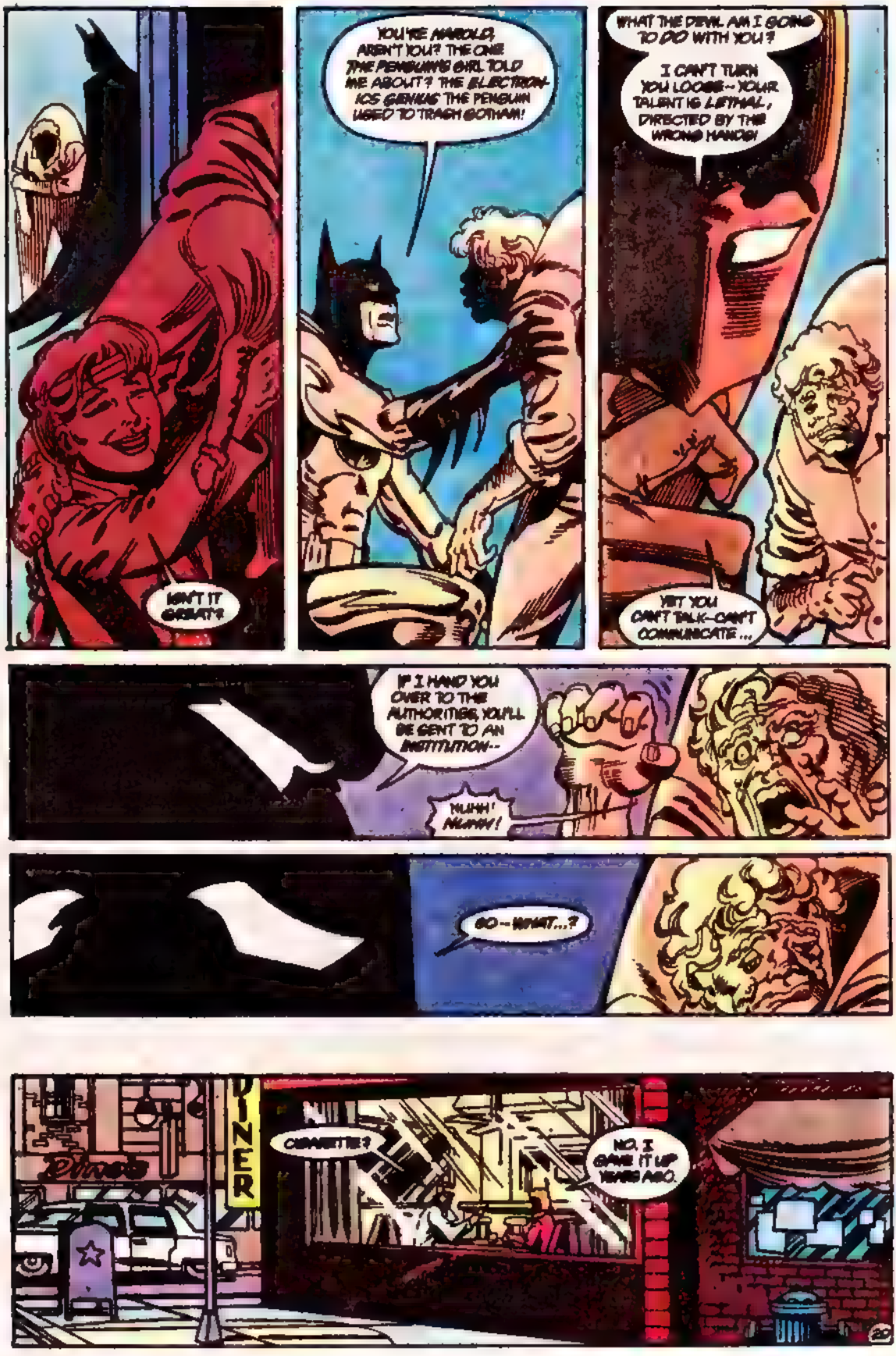

STATION ON YOUR REGULAR MIDNIGHT PATROL, COMMISSIONER?
IT'S JIM, SARAH, AND NO-- I WAS WAITING.
YOU WEREN'T. MEANT TO KNOW SORRY
BUT .. WHY, JIM?
IN A FEW HOURS, YOU'LL BE A COP UNDER MY COMMAND. I.. GUESS I WANTED TO SEE YOU AS A WOM--
DAMMIT, SARAH! THIS IS EMBARRASSING!
COME ON YOU COULD USE A COFFEE
LOOK AFTER THE BAGS! I'LL BE BACK
TAXI

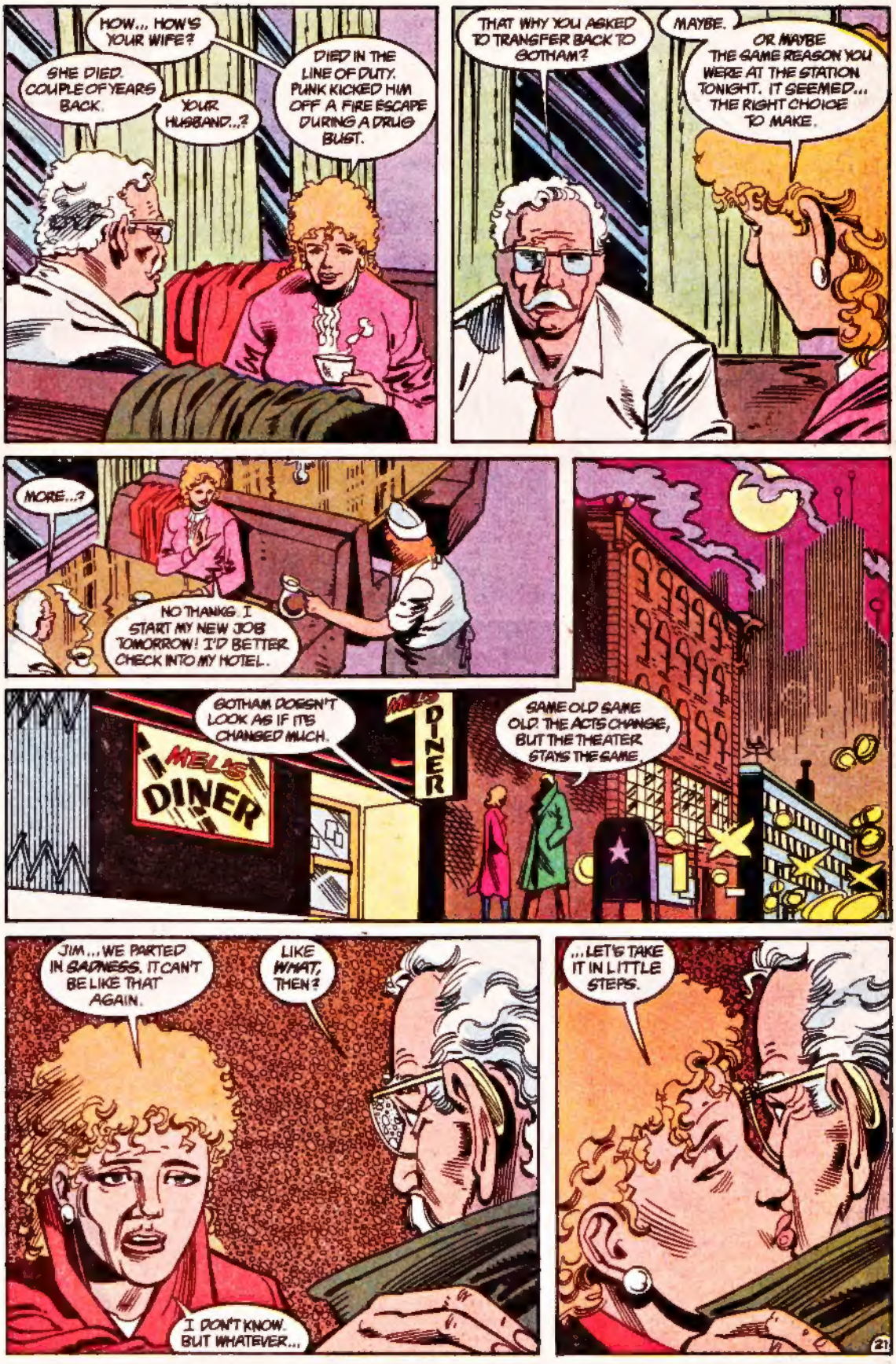

CHECK IN THERE!
SOMETHING MOVING!
KRASH!

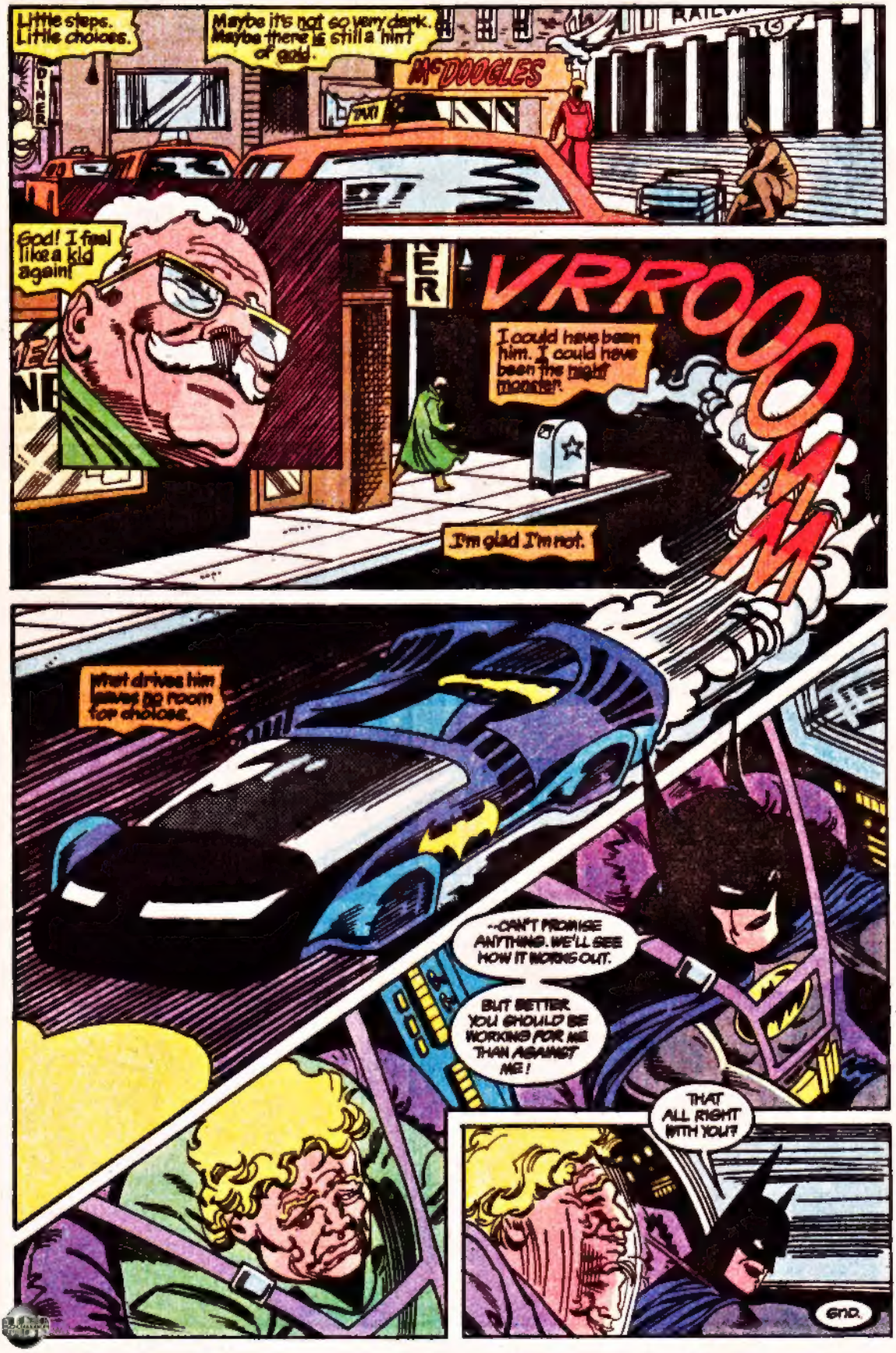
THROUGH THERE!
MELISSA...?
WOULD YA LOOK AT THAT!
THAT'S HER DOLL!
OUT WITH IT, YOU FREAK! WHERE IS SHE? IF YOU'VE HARMED ONE HAIR ON HER HEAD--!
WHERE IS SHE?
DADDY! YOU MUSTN'T!
17

MELISSA!
OH HONEY! HONEY...!
BUT YOU'RE HURT! WHAT DID HE—?
HE DIDN'T DO ANYTHING. SCAFFOLDING FELL ON HER WHEN SHE HEADED BACK HOME.
MR. FIXXIT...?
DON'T CRY.
I KNOW YOU'RE NOT BAD! I WON'T LET THEM HURT YOU!
WELL? STILL WANT TO DESTROY THE MONSTER?
I...
NO...
I'M SORRY
BAM!


OH! YOU FIXED VICTORIA!
HE CAN'T HAVE, HONEY I TOLD YOU-- THE ELECTRONICS WERE BURNED OUT.
BUT NEVER MIND. I'LL GET YOU A NEW--
I love you. I love you lots!
THANK YOU! THANK YOU!
C'MON--BETTER GET YOU HOME, YOUNG LADY! YOUR MOTHER WILL BE WORRIED SICK!
BATMAN...?
WILL MR FIXIT BE GOING AWAY NOW?
YES.
BUT DON'T WORRY. I'LL SEE HE'S LOOKED AFTER.
19


AIN'T IT GREAT?
YOU'RE HAROLD, AREN'T YOU? THE ONE THE PENGUIN'S GIRL TOLD ME ABOUT? THE ELECTRONICS GENIUS THE PENGUIN USED TO TRASH GOTHAM!
WHAT THE DEVIL AM I GOING TO DO WITH YOU?
I CAN'T TURN YOU LOOSE-- YOUR TALENT IS LETHAL, DIRECTED BY THE WRONG HANDS!
YET YOU CAN'T TALK--CAN'T COMMUNICATE...
IF I HAND YOU OVER TO THE AUTHORITIES, YOU'LL BE SENT TO AN INSTITUTION--
MUHH! MUHH!
SO--WHAT...?
DINER
CIGARETTE?
NO, I GAVE IT UP YEARS AGO.


HOW... HOW'S YOUR WIFE?
SHE DIED. COUPLE OF YEARS BACK.
YOUR HUSBAND...?
DIED IN THE LINE OF DUTY. PUNK KICKED HIM OFF A FIRE ESCAPE DURING A DRUG BUST.
THAT WHY YOU ASKED TO TRANSFER BACK TO GOTHAM?
MAYBE.
OR MAYBE THE SAME REASON YOU WERE AT THE STATION TONIGHT. IT SEEMED... THE RIGHT CHOICE TO MAKE.
MORE...?
NO THANKS. I START MY NEW JOB TOMORROW! I'D BETTER CHECK INTO MY HOTEL.
GOTHAM DOESN'T LOOK AS IF IT'S CHANGED MUCH.
MEL'S DINER
SAME OLD SAME OLD. THE ACTS CHANGE, BUT THE THEATER STAYS THE SAME.
JIM... WE PARTED IN SADNESS. IT CAN'T BE LIKE THAT AGAIN.
LIKE WHAT, THEN?
I DON'T KNOW. BUT WHATEVER...
...LET'S TAKE IT IN LITTLE STEPS.
21


Little steps. Little choices.
Maybe it's not so very dark. Maybe there is still a hint of gold.
DINER
McDOOGLES
TAXI
RAILW
God! I feel like a kid again!
VRROOOMM
I could have been him. I could have been the night monster.
I'm glad I'm not.
What drives him leaves no room for choices.
--CAN'T PROMISE ANYTHING. WE'LL SEE HOW IT WORKS OUT.
BUT BETTER YOU SHOULD BE WORKING FOR ME THAN AGAINST ME!
THAT ALL RIGHT WITH YOU?
END.

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Dear Bat-People,

Re: BATMAN #452-454

Oh, dear. Mr. Nigma has finally gone over the edge.

The Riddler has always been obsessive, but at least he's managed to avoid a trip to Arkham. From all appearances, it doesn't seem like that track record is going to last. There's no turning back. Can a team-up with the Joker be far behind?

Seriously, though, when I last wrote, I mentioned a similarity between the Riddler and Shakespeare's Iago. That description has never been more apt. In fact, if Iago had read Machiavelli's THE PRINCE and had a subscription to *Games Magazine*, he would have been the Riddler. Peter Milligan's interpretation of him is one of the best I've seen.

Julio Diaz
8713 Linda Court
Tampa, FL 33604

We had a feeling that 'most everyone would enjoy this new interpretation of the Riddler. Little did we know that there would be a NEW controversy lurking underfoot . . .

* * * * *

Dear Batty Ones,

"Dark Knight/Dark City" ended in BATMAN #454, but it is a story I shall remember for a long time. There have been many memorable Batman tales in the three books recently, but this one is special.

Peter Milligan excelled in plot and script. The story of the Riddler's reenactment of Jacob Stockman's dark ritual unfolded in this final chapter will chilling conviction. Just as Batman was baffled by the Prince of Puzzler's actions, so I was at a loss to figure out just what the scheme was. (At least I'm in good company!). Then, as the villain explained, my reactions were similar to those of the Dark Knight. Shock. Horror. Disgust. The Riddler's ultimate role as pawn to the demon Barbathos was some little satisfaction. But I was most impressed with the final sequence, and Batman's rescue of the ghost of the tragic Dominique. The macabre has returned to the Batman mythos in a big way recently, but never with such poignancy as here. The last page was intense, as Peter gave us the man in Batman as only the best writers have done before. I really loved the thoughts that read, "I'll look down at him as my parents must once have looked down at me. I might even make a funny face."

Kieron Dwyer and Dennis Janke were not outdone by Peter on this thrilling tale. The art throughout has been superb. The shadows were used effectively but never allowed to distort the heroic figure of the Batman. There was a fine sense of detail in the art, and the pages were positively oozing atmosphere. I hope it won't be long before this team is allowed an encore.

One final point. I prefer to believe that Barbathos merely bent his (its?) will toward encouraging the climate in Gotham City that eventually brought about the killing of Thomas and Martha Wayne, and the birth of the Batman. Anything more direct would be too much of an impingement on the legend. What do you think?

Best,
Dale Coe
56 Whitecross Road, Warrington
Cheshire WA5 1LR
ENGLAND

Well, we'll plead the Fifth on that last point (for now), but many other readers had opinions on recent "additions" to the Batman mythos. Witness . . .

* * * * *

Dear Denny,

Sandwiched between Mike Mignola's stunning cover and the final panels in which we realize that even Batman is troubled by self-doubts, issue #453 was a fine Bat-tale. Perhaps the "Dark Knight/Dark City" trilogy should be subtitled "The Riddler Comes Of Age."

Unfortunately I have a complaint to make. Actually it's not just a criticism of this issue, but of a recent trend amongst writers: to keep adding to the origin story. As it was first conceived, it was a sudden and brutal act which drastically altered the life of a whole city. It's always been the most effective and believable hero origin; however, as more and more detail is added to that fateful day/night, all of the impact is being lost. Rather than being an event that lurked in the dark recesses of the reader's mind, it is in danger of becoming merely an overused psychological plot device.

Yours sincerely,
Martin Simcox
84 Barnett Lane, Wordsley
Stourbridge, West Midlands
DY8 5PX ENGLAND

Thank you, and please step down. Next witness, please . . .

* * * * *

Dear Bat-People,

Well, I guess I owe you guys an apology. I thought that you were going to just magically re-invent the Riddler to be even crazier and nastier than the Joker. When the Riddler's thug said "What's happening to the boss? Never seen him so crazy. Or so bloodthirsty, for that matter," and then later "You're starting to make the Joker look absolutely sensible," I felt a lot better. At least you were going to acknowledge that he wasn't acting in character. I see, now that I have read part two of "Dark Knight/Dark City," you are at least trying to explain this change by having the Riddler influenced by demonic forces. I think I can accept this explanation, but I can't quite decide whether I'd like him to stay this way permanently.

This is developing as a clever and genuinely scary story with a Gotham City history lesson at the heart. The idea that there is an ancient Bat-Demon (and I assume this is where you're going) imprisoned beneath the very street where Batman's parents were killed has a lot of interesting ramifications. Did the demon influence Joe Chill to kill the Waynes? Did he influence Bruce to become an earthly expression of his vengeance? If so, does this perhaps put into question whether Batman is a true force for good?

If all this is true, I have one objection. Please don't keep adding these incredible bat-influences into Batman's origin. In recent months it has become so complicated that it is getting cumbersome. We have Bruce falling into a bat-infested cave, Bruce's encounter with the story and ancient bat-mask from "Shaman," the bat that flew into the window of Wayne Manor, and now this bat-demon. It's fine to get into the parts of Batman and young Bruce Wayne's history that may have contributed to his becoming what he is today, but the essential Batman origin should be able to be told in one comic book page. Please see if you can resist making the Dark Knight's origin even more elaborate than it already is.

Actually, now that I think of it, all these "coincidences" involving Bruce and bats may have been influenced by this bat-demon. Am I on to something? I guess I'll just have to buy the next issue of BATMAN and find out.

Sincerely,
Larry Feldman
841 S. Corona Street
Denver, CO 80209

Would anyone like to come to our defense? Or do most of you feel the same way as our witnesses above? Actually, the basic Batman origin can STILL be stripped down to its essentials. The real question is whether the embellishments are overwhelming the base. Comments, anyone?

* * * * *

Dear Batty Ones,

I hate to say it, but the "Dark Knight/Dark City" saga wasn't my favorite Batman story by a longshot. It seems that everywhere Batman turns these days, he's dealing with the supernatural. We were given a good tale of such in the first storyline for the LEGEND OF THE DARK KNIGHT comic, and Bats is having personal problems with the Obeah Man over in DETECTIVE. Pleeeeeeze don't give us any more spook stories. I like *Dark Shadows* and old horror flicks, but I don't

think they mesh with Batman. He isn't really a creature of the night, he is a man—a good man who loves justice and hates seeing weak and innocent people hurt. He may let people THINK he's supernatural, as it helps put fear in the hearts of criminals, but that's about it.

The second problem was the treatment of the Riddler. Does EVERY costumed foe of Batman have to be a homicidal maniac? I agree with those who said similar things about the Penguin: there are some villains who are best treated lightly, almost (dare I say it?) campy. I have no problem with evildoers like Joker and Two-Face going on killing sprees and terrorizing everyone in sight, but goons like Riddler and Penguin should be more amusing than deadly. There is no reason why Batman should have to face a mass murderer every issue.

The final complaint (yes, the end is in sight) is one I'll bet you've already heard enough of—the use of Thomas Jefferson as a Satanic worshipper. I'd hoped in this issue we would learn that he wasn't really involved—maybe he was spying on the group or something. I just don't feel comics should use historical figures in such a strongly negative light, unless it might be someone universally despised, such as Hitler.

Yeah, I know. Complaints, complaints . . . Hey, you can't please everyone.

Live Long,
Steve Davis
Indianapolis, IN

P.S. Forget what I said about the supernatural. I just realized what DC's address is . . .

Better luck this time, Steve? We hope the current storyline is more to your liking . . .

Dear Denny,

I've just finished BATMAN #454, part three of "Dark Knight/Dark City," and I'm in awe. The story was fabulous. Mr. Milligan has created a story that, like BATMAN: YEAR ONE and "Blind Justice," builds a history and an atmosphere which Batman is a natural part of. With the advent of LEGENDS OF THE DARK KNIGHT, I had almost given up hope of seeing such powerful stories about Batman's background in BATMAN or 'TEC. The only thing I would have changed about the story would have been to make it longer. I realize that my last letter asked for shorter stories and fewer miniseries, but if you keep producing stories of this quality, I'll be happy no matter how long they are. I also complained about the recent treatment of Alfred, but I enjoyed his role in "Dark Knight/Dark City." Before I forget, let me congratulate Mr. Dwyer, Mr. Janke and the rest of the team as well. The visuals were every bit as compelling as the story, and I believe if either of your current creative teams depart, these guys could fill their shoes (no easy task!).

I'm surprised to learn that the creative teams will be swapping books, though I'm certain both will continue to produce the high quality work we've come to expect. I'd been half expecting to see one or both of the teams leave since Grant and Breyfogle have been on 'TEC together since #583 and Apero has been on BATMAN since #414, and I'm glad to see they'll be staying on for a while.

'Till next time,
Clint Ragsdale
1116 Collinwood Street
Opelika, AL 36801

P.S. Of course Batman knows who killed Laura Palmer. He just doesn't want to ruin ABC's ratings.

By the time this sees print, we will all have found out who killed Laura (or else I'll be convinced that this whole Twin Peaks *thing is some kind of sadistic mind-control. You know, like comic books . . .)*

* * * * *

Dear DC,

The new Riddler has finally made it. He can now be considered a major Batman villain. All he needs is the Frank Gorshin laugh and he'd be perfect! I hope to see more of this new, psychotic Riddler.

There is one problem I had with the story, though: the pit bull scene. You would think that an industry that, for decades, has been the object of mindless stereotyping would be the LAST ones to do the same. Yet, that's just what you did with the pit bulls. My grandparents owned a pit bull—they acquired him when he was over 2 years old, from total strangers. Within a month, Sparky was comfortable with his new owners. Whenever I went to their house, I'd play with Sparky. He barely knew me, but he was as playful, friendly, and gentle as a dog comes.

I would have enjoyed the Riddler saga a lot more if the Batman had sliced and diced some mad house cats instead.

Lee Soloman
Sterling Hts., MI

Pit bulls HAVE gotten a bad rep, mostly from the news media (and stand-up comedians). Obviously, all members of a particular species will not have the same temperament; however, pit bull terriers CAN be driven to a frenzy (as can virtually ANY animal) by means of drugs or even simple irritation, as the dogs in our story were. Having them labeled as pit bulls was simply a story short-cut and we DO regret the stereotyping.

* * * * *

NEXT ISSUE: Batman confronts a vicious killer on the very spot where his parents were killed. Plus, things heat up for Jim Gordon and Sarah Essen. BATMAN #459 is by Alan Grant, Norm Breyfogle, and Steve Mitchell and is a long 30 days away. Also next month, there will be someone new selecting and answering your letters, as I prepare to move back to my home state of Wisconsin. The real "Gotham" has its advantages, but I miss trees and fresh air and quiet. Anyway, I had a great deal of fun working on this lettercolumn and enjoyed meeting many of you at various conventions. See you in the funny books!

—KC Carlson
Typing into the sunset . . .

From the Den

Last time, in this space, we discussed ego. The subject might be worth a few more paragraphs.

For about 20 years, comics fans didn't know who created the adventures of their favorite characters. From the early '40s through the late '50s, with very few exceptions, stories weren't bylined. Oh, an artist might sneak a signature into his work somewhere, but there were no credits. A brief investigation—*exceedingly* brief, I must admit—into why did not reveal any company policies to that effect, and if there were any, they were almost certainly informal. Bylining was simply something that wasn't done.

Most people would argue that this wasn't fair to either readers or creators. After all, if nothing else, bylines serve as consumer guides. If Charlie Prose did a yarn you liked this month, chances are you'll like *next* month's Charlie Prose piece, too.

As for Charlie himself . . . well, there is always the matter of money if enough readers enjoy a Charlie Prose job and show their appreciation by buying the magazine it appears in, Charlie's boss might decide he has to keep Charlie happy when raises are discussed. For this to happen, of course, the readers must be able to immediately identify Charlie's work. Charlie must acquire some kind of identity in the audiences' mind, even if that identity is limited to the three syllables of his name.

Money is seldom more than part of a creator's engine, however. The other parts are a desire to please and a desire for recognition. Maybe even—whisper this—a desire to be loved. And that is why it might be possible to argue *against* bylines. Because if Charlie's desire to be loved becomes a fear that Charlie *won't* be loved should his story be less than wonderful, he might worry, either consciously or unconsciously, about that, rather than concentrating on plot, pacing, characterization, invention—all the myriad and complex components of his craft. The ironic result could be that the story, indeed, isn't the best that Charlie's capable of writing.

Charlie might worry that if his popularity wanes, so will his ability to put Charlie Jr. through taxidermy school, something that wouldn't happen if his income depended solely on productivity. Or that recognition might become disdain; Charlie may be canny enough to realize that the folk who hail you as genius today might be damning you as dullard tomorrow. These things, too, might get between him and the murky interior region wherein stories live.

Shadows are cool and comfortable. In a spotlight, many people sweat.

And in the end, it's the tale, not the teller, that's important.

Am I suggesting a return to the bad old days? No, not at all. I'm merely observing that blessings are seldom unmixed, and the blessing that enabled you to be an informed consumer when you bought this magazine is no exception.

Denny